

But Stresses That Vigilance Must Continue

By Edward T. Folliard

CPYRGHT

President Kennedy assured the Nation yesterday that the Soviet Union's forces and weapons in Cuba are not a military threat to the United States.

He was talking at a news conference about the Cuban situation as it is at the moment. Refusing to prophesy about the future, he said it could not be proved that the Russians won't again try to ship nuclear missiles to the island.

And then he emphasized what would be the consequences, saying:

"The Soviet Union and Cuba and the United States must all be aware that this will pro-

Transcript of President's news conference.

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William McC. Martin re-named Federal Reserve System chairman. Page B9.

duce the greatest crisis which the world has faced in its history.

"So I think that the Soviet Union will proceed with caution and care, and I think we should."

The Chief Executive held his 48th news conference in the State Department Auditorium before 378 reporters at a time when members of Congress, mostly Republicans, have been insisting that the Soviet Union is continuing a threatening, military buildup in Cuba.

Mr. Kennedy, backing up a statement Wednesday by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, said the Russians have reduced the size of their forces and the amount of their equipment since the pull-out of missiles and bombers last fall.

He said it was a time to "keep our heads," that President Kennedy had been "discredited" in recent months

and that the United States and the Soviet Union are continuing talks about the removal of Russian forces and weapons from Cuba. He indicated that the United States had no present thought of an invasion of Cuba.

Troops a "Concern"

A reporter asked the President what he was going to do about Soviet troops in Cuba. Was he just going to let them stay there?

Mr. Kennedy's reply was that much already had been done, referring to the showdown in which Russia withdrew her missiles and some technicians, but he acknowledged that the continued presence of Soviet fighting men in Cuba was a matter of "concern."

"You have said that the presence of Russian forces on the island is a matter of concern," a reporter said. "I would like to ask this question: Do you think that Cuba is a serious military threat to the United States?"

"I think we ought to keep a sense of proportion about the size of the force we are talking about," Mr. Kennedy replied, adding that the Russians had about four organized military groups in Cuba, totalling about 6000 men.

"Obviously," he continued, "those forces cannot be used to invade another country."

They may be used to maintain some sort of control within Cuba, but obviously they are not a force that can be used externally.

"And, in addition, Cuba cannot possibly, it lacks any amphibious equipment, and quite obviously our power in that area is overwhelming."

Subversion Base

Mr. Kennedy said the big dangers in Latin America—illiteracy, bad housing, maldistribution of wealth, and so on—were unrelated to Cuba. It was at this point that he said that Castro had been "discredited since October. But he went on to say that he was concerned about Cuba being used as a training center for Red agents and as a base for propaganda and subversion.

He repeated that Cuba was not a military threat now, and would not become one unless Russia reintroduced offensive weapons there.

Asked about the chances of eliminating communism from Cuba, the President refused to make any predictions. One way, he said, would be for the Cubans to revolt, which he thought would be difficult now.

"The other way would be by external action," he said. "But that is war, and we should not regard that as a cheap or easy way to accomplish what we wish..."

A reporter wanted to know what more the Administration can do to convince Republican critics that the Russians have withdrawn all of offensive weapons from Cuba.

Mr. Kennedy said he didn't know — that Secretary McNamara and CIA Director John McCone had asked anybody possessing information about a Russian build-up to turn it over to the Government so that it could be checked.

But "even some member of Congress" have refused to do this, after spreading reports and rumors, the President said.

"Now," he said, "I remember a story the other day in one of our prominent papers which had a report of a Congressman about the presence of missiles — no supporting evidence, no willingness to come forward and admit the information. We are not, after all, a foreign power."

Cites Responsibility

Mr. Kennedy at this point gave the press a mild lecture. He said the story about the Congressman and missiles was a page-one story, while a statement by the Secretary of Defense giving clear details about the situation was on Page 10.

"So it is a responsibility of ours and, it seems to me, also the press," he said. "I would think that a good many Americans, after the last three weeks of headlines, have the impression that there are offensive weapons in Cuba. It is our judgment, based on the best intelligence we can get, that there are not offensive weapons in Cuba..."

Sen. Kenneth B. Keating (R-N. Y.) said after the President's news conference that he "still cannot accept the much touted distinction between offensive and defensive weapons."

Rep. William C. Cramer (R-Fla.), another critic of the President, said that Congress had authorized the Chief Executive to use armed force, if necessary, to prevent any further buildup in Cuba, but that a mandate is being ignored.

The Cuban issue, which many thought was buried with the Nov. 6 election, flared up all over Capitol Hill again yesterday. Speaker John McCormack said that "politics" motivated some of the Republican critics. Rep. Samuel S. Stratton (D-N. Y.) said he thought Sen. Keating owed it to the American people to come forward and admit he made a mistake.